

## Why Your College or University Should Achieve the Best Workplaces for Commuters<sup>SM</sup> Designation August 24, 2005

On August 24, 2005, EPA hosted a conference call to introduce colleges and universities to Best Workplaces for Commuters. Kevin Tingley, EPA forum moderator, provided a brief introduction and explained that the call was a way for colleges and universities to learn more about Best Workplaces for Commuters, the application process, and the benefits of the designation.

### Featured Speakers

#### Connie Ruth

U.S. EPA

Connie Ruth, a member of the Best Workplaces for Commuters team, is the EPA lead on the new national college and university initiative. Ms. Ruth spoke generally about Best Workplaces for Commuters and how the challenges faced by colleges and universities make them great candidates for the designation. Colleges and universities face a unique set of challenges on their campuses—heavy vehicle traffic, limited space for parking, and competition in recruiting the best faculty and staff. Ms. Ruth explained that providing commuter benefits is an effective way to address these problems because for every trip reduced, the university does not need to provide a parking space. Therefore, colleges and universities can actually save money by providing an excellent commuter benefits package.

Ms. Ruth then discussed in detail the Best Workplaces for Commuters *National Standard of Excellence*—the level of commuter benefits that employer must provide in order to receive the designation.

The on-line application form takes about 10 - 15 minutes to fill out. Ms. Ruth indicated that typically colleges and universities qualify for the primary benefit through providing a \$30 subsidy for transit or vanpooling. Some universities qualify for the primary benefit by submitting an employer proposal. More information about the criteria is available on the website. Go to “Do We Qualify for the List?” at <[www.bwc.gov](http://www.bwc.gov)>. Ms. Ruth also clarified that to qualify for Best Workplaces for Commuters, the benefits must be for the employees, not the students. As of August 24, 2005, more than 55 colleges and universities have received the designation by providing their employees with this high level of commuter benefits.

Employers who qualify receive the Best Workplaces for Commuters designation, which provides the following benefits:

- A spot on the Best Workplaces for Commuters list
- Positive press coverage in both national and regional media outlets
- Rights to use the Best Workplaces for Commuters logo
- Networking opportunities such as Employer Phone Forums
- Technical assistance

To conclude her presentation, Ms. Ruth mentioned that Best Workplaces for Commuters will be involved in two upcoming conferences—the Association for Commuter Transportation International Conference in Anaheim, California

# For Employers

(September 18-21, 2005, <[www.actweb.org](http://www.actweb.org)>), and the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA-HR) Conference in Orlando, Florida (September 25-28, 2005, <[www.cupahr.org](http://www.cupahr.org)>). If you attend, please feel free to stop by the Best Workplaces for Commuters booth for more information.

## Deborah Freed

*Alternative Transportation Manager*

*Virginia Tech*

Deborah Freed, the Alternative Transportation Manager at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Virginia, discussed her experience implementing commuter benefits at both the University of North Carolina (UNC) and Virginia Tech. Ms. Freed explained that even though the environments of the two universities are very different (UNC is urban and Virginia Tech is more rural), both universities faced similar problems associated with parking on and around campus.

At UNC, Ms. Freed helped create a commute alternatives program that achieved the Best Workplaces for Commuters designation. The university was happy with the positive media coverage that it received, and the university's commute alternatives program successfully transformed UNC into a multi-modal community.

When Ms. Freed took a new position at Virginia Tech, she immediately considered how Best Workplaces for Commuters fit with the university's transportation programs. Because the university is located in a more rural area, air quality and congestion are not as big of a concern; however, parking capacity is an issue. Based on its existing commuter programs—which include free bus service for

employees, ridematching through AlterNetRides, and an emergency ride home—Virginia Tech applied for and received the Best Workplaces for Commuters designation.

Ms. Freed sees the Best Workplaces for Commuters designation as an opportunity to demonstrate to the community that the university is on the cutting-edge of transportation issues and is working to be a beneficial member of the community.

## Susan Rains

*Commuter & Access Services Coordinator*

*Cal Poly State University- San Luis Obispo*

Cal Poly State University in San Luis Obispo, California, was recently designated as one of the Best Workplaces for Commuters. The university's motivation for applying was focused on continuing its efforts towards maintaining good air quality in the community. The university had started a commuter benefits program 10 years ago and provides a wide variety of commuter benefits including:

- Free city bus transportation to all employees and students
- Additional subsidies for using alternate forms of transportation including the regional bus system
- Vanpools
- Rideshare matching through AlterNetRides and the local transportation agency
- Emergency ride home

Ms. Rains concluded her presentation by explaining that the process to apply for the Best Workplaces for Commuters designation is simple and also emphasized benefit of receiving opportunities for recognition once a university has received the designation.

# For Employers

## Open Discussion

- Ms. Freed asked the other universities on the call about their vanpool programs, specifically if any of the universities own the vans or if they use outside service providers. Ms. Rains responded that Cal Poly State University purchased prior-leased vans that were approximately one year old for its vanpool program. Ms. Ruth also mentioned that the University of Michigan has contracted with VPSI for its vanpool programs.
- Lawrence D'Arco from New York State asked the speakers to talk a bit more about the ridematching Web site they mentioned. AlterNetRides is an online matching system that can be specifically tailored for your organization. It is available at <[www.alternetrides.com](http://www.alternetrides.com)>.
- Belinda Wilson from Orlando, Florida, asked for more information about how the vanpool program at Cal Poly State University was started. Ms. Rains said that the vanpool program was initially directed toward the university's facility workers and has been expanded to include more vans that operate on an 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. schedule. Additional vans are added based on customer demand.
- Ms. Wilson also asked if there are any universities in Florida that have been designated as Best Workplaces for Commuters. Ms. Ruth indicated that no universities in Florida have yet been designated; however, Mr. Tingley mentioned that the South Florida Education Center has been designated as a Best Workplaces for Commuters District.
- Mr. Tingley briefly described a Best Workplaces for Commuters District as a defined geographic area in which employees receive commuter benefits meeting EPA's *National Standard of Excellence*. The benefits are provided, not by the employer, but by another organization, such as a TMA or business park.
- Lynn Frank from the Downtown Minneapolis TMO asked if many private colleges and universities have received the Best Workplaces for Commuters designation. Ms. Ruth explained that EPA has not yet specifically targeted private universities; however, it would be interested in looking more into that topic and considering the specific challenges faced by private universities.
- Ms. Wilson mentioned that there are periodic university summits in Central Florida to discuss transportation issues. One is tentatively planned for early next spring, and she hopes that someone from EPA might be available to discuss Best Workplaces for Commuters.
- Kim Byrne from University of California (UC)-Irvine also mentioned that for those individuals traveling to Anaheim for the ACT Conference in September, the university is offering several tours that might be of interest. The first is a tour of the UC-Irvine campus to discuss parking and transportation issues and the second is a tour of the university's national fuel cell research center.
- Ms. Byrne also inquired about the application and verification process for Best Workplaces for Commuters. Ms. Ruth explained that the application and verification process has been streamlined. Typically within a week or two most employers will be posted on the Best Workplaces for Commuters Web site.

## Closing

Mr. Tingley concluded the call by thanking everyone for participating. A summary will be posted on <[www.bwc.gov](http://www.bwc.gov)>. Please email <[bwc@epa.gov](mailto:bwc@epa.gov)> to request a cd with the recorded audio version of the conference call.